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ABSTRACT

Students and parents are offered advice in this booklet on how to make the most of homework. The booklet first reviews the basic reasons for assigning homework: homework helps students learn better and faster, helps families become involved with education, communicates the school's high expectations, and helps students develop self-discipline and organizational skills. Specific methods students can use to improve homework skills include establishing appropriate places and times for studying, previewing the material, focusing attention, reading carefully and thinking about the concepts covered, casting what is learned in different forms, self-testing, and taking notes effectively. Parents can encourage students by helping them discipline themselves, by reinforcing the idea that studying improves performance, and by maintaining awareness of the students' attitudes and concerns.
(PGD)

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Homework: Helping Students Achieve

Educators and parents share one common goal—to help each student in our schools be successful. Each group plays an important role in student achievement. Students learn best when they, their parents, and their schools work together.

Homework is one way families and schools can cooperate to improve students' learning. This book, designed for both parents and students, offers specific information on how students can learn to do the best possible job with their homework. It also suggests some ways parents can use homework to become more involved with the education of their sons and daughters.

By putting the suggestions in this book into practice, you can ensure that students achieve their educational potential. Even more important, you'll be making sure that students are laying the groundwork for a successful future.

Why Do Schools Assign Homework?

Studies show that the amount of time students spend learning a skill directly affects their ability to master it.



There are several reasons:

1 Homework Helps Students Learn Better and Faster. Research shows that many successful teachers assign meaningful homework. By asking students to spend some of their out-of-class time working on a specific skill or subject, teachers make it possible to spend class time teaching students even more.

2 Homework Helps Families Become Involved with Education. We know that for schools to do the best possible job educating each student, parents and schools must work together. Homework is one way parents can make a meaningful contribution to helping their sons and daughters achieve. When students see that their parents think education is important, their performance improves.

3 Homework Communicates the High Expectations That Schools Hold for Their Students. The best schools have confidence that their students can and will achieve. Assigning meaningful homework is one way of letting students develop confidence in their own abilities.

4 Homework Helps Students Develop Self-Discipline and Organizational Skills. Through homework, students learn how to manage their time. They learn the importance of setting goals and working to achieve them. They learn to be responsible for their own achievements. All these skills will help them continue to be successful throughout their lives.

Homework Hints



If you're a student, you can improve homework skills just as you improve skills in math or science. These steps show you ways to be more successful with homework.

Find a place and time for studying.

Set aside a place for studying. All you really need is a work table in a relatively quiet place, good light, and a comfortable chair. A desk in your bedroom is great, but the kitchen table works fine. It's helpful to keep study materials like a dictionary, pens and pencils, and paper nearby.

Plan specific times for studying. A schedule can help you see how to find time for the things that are important to you—doing homework, participating in afterschool activities, spending time with friends, doing chores or handling a job. Keep your schedule flexible—but if you find you're doing homework every night after 11 p.m., you may have been *too* flexible!

Preview the material.

Before you begin any study session, scan the material quickly. Ask yourself, "What am I supposed to learn from this assignment? What seems to be the main idea?" If you're working on a reading assignment, for example, look at the introduction, the heading, and the summary before reading the text itself. If you're working on mathematical problems, try to see which skill is being learned.

Pay attention to what you're learning.

Paying attention is a skill, and it can be learned. Here are some ways you can learn to pay attention:

- **Ask Questions.** To focus your attention on what you're studying, try to find the main point in what's being covered. Some questions you might ask include: "What's this paragraph about? What will I need to remember for class discussion tomorrow? Do I agree with what's being said?" In American history, for example, you might ask yourself, "What were things like back then? How did kids my age act?"
- **Set Specific Study Goals.** Know where you're going and what you're trying to learn. Challenge yourself—say, "I'm going to finish these ten math problems correctly in the next 20 minutes." Then reward yourself: "Once I'm sure these problems are correct, I'm going to take a break and relax."
- **Imagine Yourself as a Successful Student.** Professional athletes use this technique; they imagine themselves being successful—perhaps hitting a home run. It works! You can use this method, too. You might say to yourself, "After I read this page, I'm going to be able to look away and remember the meaning of what I just read." You can also imagine yourself calmly and confidently taking a test on the material you're studying, knowing all the answers because you studied the material thoroughly.



Read carefully and generate thoughts.

By using the techniques for paying attention, you can help make sure that the time you spend studying will be productive. For example, try pausing after reading each section or chapter to ask yourself some questions about what you've just read. If you're still unclear about the main point of the section, go back over it.

When you use learning techniques like asking questions and finding the main idea, you're *elaborating* on what you've learned—making connections between what you already know and what you're learning. This helps make the reading material more understandable and easier to remember.

You don't always have to wait until you come to the end of a section to elaborate on the material you've studied. You may need to stop more frequently in some subjects. A study method that is great for a history class may not work in a science course. Try several different methods and see which ones work best for you.



Be an active learner.

By practicing "active learning," you can use your study time efficiently. These techniques should help you get the most out of the time you spend on homework.

- **Draw Conclusions From What You're Studying.** This is sometimes called "making inferences," and it's important for all learners. Drawing conclusions helps you concentrate on new material and makes it more meaningful and easier to remember. If you're reading about the invention of electricity, for example, try to think about how your life would change if electrical power suddenly went off—forever.
- **Create Analogies.** Analogies are like mental bridges between what you know and what you'd like to learn. For instance, suppose you were studying the transportation system of the 1800s. You may not know much about transportation 100 years ago, but you do know how we get around today. So, you create analogies—in the 1800s, horses were the primary means of transportation, like cars are today. Yesterday's passenger trains are like today's jet planes. And trucks move freight in the same way that horse-drawn wagons did a century ago.
- **Categorize Information.** When you are faced with a lot of information to learn, it often helps to group the material into categories. In science, for example, you don't study "animals." You study reptiles, or mammals, or fish, or birds or some other group. Similarly, in a music class, you don't learn about "instruments." You may first learn about string instruments, then woodwinds, then brass, then percussion.



Test yourself.

Students sometimes spend too much time studying information they already know. So that you can use your study time to your best advantage, test yourself to find out what you do and don't know. Then you can spend your time studying the challenging material.

Using your notes, draw up a series of questions about the material you've studied. Try writing down the answers to the questions, or ask someone to listen to your answers. Then use your notes to check your answers.

How to Take Notes

Even with the best memory, it's impossible to remember everything that you've read. Taking notes—both in class and when you're reading—can help you summarize the information you need to remember.

In class, your teacher will frequently give you some clues about the things you should write in your notes. For example, if your teacher writes something on the board, you should probably write it in your notes. If the teacher spends a lot of time on a particular subject, you should probably take notes on that as well.

Listen for verbal clues that can help. These include phrases like, "three reasons for . . .," "the purpose of . . .," and "in summary." Every teacher has a slightly different way of pointing out which materials are most important. If you're confused, it's a good idea to ask your teacher to explain how he or she shows what is important.

When you're reading, look for things written in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS, **bold face type**, or *italics*. They usually indicate important points for your notes.

Tips on Taking Notes

There are several excellent books that can help you learn how to take better notes. Here's one method you can use:

Draw a line, top to bottom, about two inches from the left edge of

several sheets of 8½ x 11 inch looseleaf notebook paper. While you're in class or reading, take notes on the **right-hand** side of the page. Usually, a paragraph or outline format works best. Be sure your notes are written legibly—you just waste valuable study time when you have to decipher scribbles.

As soon as possible after class or reading, go back through your notes. If possible, review all your notes on the topic. Finish any incomplete thoughts and clarify any confusing notes while the information is still fresh in your mind. As you're going through the notes, jot a key word or phrase in the left-hand column. Use these phrases as headings to help you locate specific sections in the notes when you're reviewing.

A Word to Parents

The most important thing you can do to help your sons or daughters with homework is help them believe that the hours spent studying can and do make a difference.

Whether you are a parent of elementary or secondary students, homework cannot become your responsibility. One of the purposes of homework is to give students the opportunity to take charge of part of their own learning. But there are some specific ways you can help your son or daughter do the best possible job on homework.

First, you can stress that homework is important. That means that you will help your son or daughter find a time and place for homework. Parents sometimes have to help young people learn how to schedule their time. For example, some families institute a rule: no television until homework is completed.

You can help your son or daughter learn to pay attention. With younger children, you can ask questions about the material being studied. You can also help them set appropriate study goals. Sometimes it's easier to review the main points of a study assignment by talking with someone. Let your son or daughter know you're available to listen.

Students do their best work when they believe they can be successful in school. When your sons or daughters have completed a study session, reinforce the idea that the study time will help them do better in school.

What if your son or daughter is having problems? First, talk about your concerns. Ask why the problems are occurring—and then really listen to the answers you receive.

You may find that your child's attitude is part of the problem. At one time or another, many students have negative feelings toward classmates or teachers. Help your son or daughter see that while these feelings are normal, they are no excuse for mediocre performance. Sometimes young people feel they just "aren't smart enough" to succeed. They need to know that you and their school are confident they can do well.

On the other hand, students sometimes have problems because of a situation beyond their control. For instance, classwork could be too hard—or too easy. In that case, you may want to meet with the teacher to discuss your concern. Your child may also have a physical problem that makes learning difficult—sometimes a pair of glasses may be all that's needed. Emotional problems and certain learning disabilities can also prevent students from doing their best. Your child's teacher or a school administrator can help you get the advice you need to help solve these problems.



Successful Students Become Successful Adults

Recently, researchers have studied people who are successful in school. They've found that successful students share some characteristics. They

- ✓ motivate themselves
- ✓ pay attention
- ✓ understand ideas
- ✓ remember facts and ideas
- ✓ work without stress.

The tips in this booklet can help students develop these traits. By using homework to help achieve success in school, students can reach their educational potential. And they can learn the skills that will help them be successful throughout their lives.

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